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# James Risen

**James Risen** (born April 27, 1955) is an American journalist for *The Intercept*. He previously worked for *The New York Times* and before that for *Los Angeles Times*. He has written or co-written many articles concerning U.S. government activities and is the author or co-author of two books about the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and a book about the American public debate about abortion. Risen is a Pulitzer Prize winner.

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## Background

Risen was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, and grew up in Bethesda, Maryland. He graduated from Brown University (1977) and received a Master's degree in Journalism at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism (1978). He is currently an investigative reporter for *The Intercept*.

Risen won the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting for his stories about President George W. Bush's warrantless wiretapping program. He was a member of *The New York Times* reporting team that won the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for explanatory reporting for coverage of the September 11th attacks and terrorism. He was also a member of *The New York Times* reporting team that was a finalist for the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for international reporting, for coverage of the 1998 bombings of two U.S. embassies in East Africa.

**James Risen**



<b>Born</b>	1955 (age 62–63) Bethesda, Maryland
<b>Alma mater</b>	Brown University (AB) Northwestern University (MS)
<b>Occupation</b>	Journalist, author

Risen has written four books: *Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War* (Basic Books) (Judy Thomas, co-author) (1998); *The Main Enemy: The Inside Story of the CIA's Final Showdown with the KGB* (Random House) (Milt Bearden, co-author) (2003); *State of War: The Secret History of the CIA and the Bush Administration* (The Free Press) (2006); and *Pay Any Price: Greed, Power, and Endless War* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) (2014). *State of War* was a *New York Times* bestseller. *Pay Any Price* was also a *New York Times* bestseller. *The Main Enemy* was awarded the 2003 Cornelius Ryan Award for "best nonfiction book on international affairs" by the Overseas Press Club of America.

## Reports on government surveillance programs

Risen and [Eric Lichtblau](#) were awarded the 2006 [Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting](#) for a series of controversial investigative reports that they co-wrote about the [National Security Agency's surveillance](#) of international communications originating or terminating in the United States code-named "[Stellar Wind](#)" and about a government program called [Terrorist Finance Tracking Program](#) designed to detect terrorist [financiers](#), which involved searches of [money transfer](#) records in the international [SWIFT](#) database.<sup>[1][2]</sup> The [Associated Press](#) reported on May 24, 2011, that Risen was being called as a witness in the [Jeffrey Sterling](#) trial for alleged leaks of [classified information](#).

## State of War

Risen is the author of the book *State of War: The Secret History of the CIA and the Bush Administration* (January 2006). The book conducted important investigations into [Central Intelligence Agency](#) activities. It states that the CIA carried out an operation in 2000 ([Operation Merlin](#)) intended to delay [Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program](#) by feeding it flawed blueprints for key missing components—which backfired and may actually have aided Iran, as the flaw was likely detected and corrected by a former Soviet nuclear scientist the operation used to make the delivery. In early 2003, *The New York Times* refrained from publication of the story after an intervention by [National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice](#) with the NYT Executive Editor Howell Raines.<sup>[3]</sup>

While doing research for the book, Risen's email and phone connections with former CIA Operations Officer [Jeffrey Alexander Sterling](#) were monitored by the US federal government.<sup>[4][5]</sup> The US federal government also obtained Risen's credit and bank records.<sup>[6]</sup> The CIA Public Affairs Office issued a press release indicating that Risen's book contains serious errors in every chapter. However, CIA documents released in January 2015 confirm many details on Operation Merlin.<sup>[7]</sup>

Risen writes in *State of War* that, "Several of the Iranian [CIA] agents were arrested and jailed, while the fate of some of the others is still unknown", after a CIA official in 2004 sent an Iranian agent an encrypted electronic message, mistakenly including data that could potentially identify "virtually every spy the CIA had inside Iran". The Iranian was a double agent and handed over the information to Iranian intelligence. This also has been denied by an intelligence official. Risen also alleges that the Bush Administration is responsible for the transformation of [Afghanistan](#) into a "[narco-state](#)", that provides a purported 80% of the world's [heroin supply](#).



*Pay Any Price: Greed, Power, and Endless War* at the Miller Center in Charlottesville, Virginia.

The publication of this book was expedited following the December 16, 2005 NSA leak story. The timing of *The New York Times* story after the Iraq election in mid December 2005 is a source of controversy since the story was delayed for over a year. *The New York Times* story appeared two days before a former NSA employee, dismissed in May 2005, requested permission to testify to two Congressional intelligence oversight committees. Byron Calame, the Public Editor of *The New York Times*, wrote in early January 2006 that two senior *Times* officials refused to comment on the timing of the article. The Department of Justice (DOJ) also conducted an investigation of the sources of the security leak involving the NSA. Risen says this book is based on information from a variety of anonymous sources, that he would protect.

The issue of journalists protecting their anonymous sources was widely discussed during this time period due to the Valerie Plame affair. In that case, former *New York Times* reporter Judith Miller was jailed for refusing to reveal a source for a story of hers. The Attorney General hinted in a Washington Post article on May 22, 2006, that journalists may be charged for any disclosure of classified national security information. President George W. Bush, in a June 25, 2006 news conference, was critical of the publication of information of classified programs by *The New York Times*.

## **United States v. Sterling**

Jeffrey Alexander Sterling was being investigated during the Bush administration. In 2010 he was indicted under the Espionage Act of 1917, one of the few people in US history whose alleged contact with a journalist was punished under espionage law.<sup>[8]</sup>

Risen was subpoenaed in relation to the case in 2008.<sup>[9]</sup> He fought the subpoena, and it expired in the summer of 2009.<sup>[10]</sup> In what *The New York Times* called "a rare step," the Obama administration renewed the subpoena in 2010.<sup>[10]</sup> In 2011, Risen wrote a detailed response to the subpoena, describing his reasons for refusing to reveal his sources, the public impact of his work, and his experiences with the Bush administration.<sup>[11]</sup>

In July 2013 US Court of Appeals from the Fourth Circuit ruled that Risen must testify in the trial of Jeffrey Sterling. The court wrote "so long as the subpoena is issued in good faith and is based on a legitimate need of law enforcement, the government need not make any special showing to obtain evidence of criminal conduct from a reporter in a criminal proceeding."<sup>[12]</sup> Judge Roger Gregory dissented, writing "The majority exalts the interests of the government while unduly trampling those of the press, and in doing so, severely impinges on the press and the free flow of information in our society."<sup>[13][14]</sup>

The Supreme Court rejected his appeal during June 2014,<sup>[15]</sup> leaving Risen facing the possibility of jail depending upon whether the federal prosecutors choose to pursue his testimony. He has stated that he will continue to refuse and is willing to go to jail.<sup>[16]</sup>

In October 2014, Attorney General Eric Holder, speaking at a Washington, D.C. event, stated "no reporter's going to jail as long as I'm attorney general."<sup>[17]</sup>

In January 2015 *The New York Times* reported that Risen "will not be called to testify at a trial", which ended a seven-year legal fight over whether he could/would be forced to identify his confidential sources.<sup>[18]</sup>

## **Wen Ho Lee**

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In an article that Risen cowrote with [Jeff Gerth](#) for [The New York Times](#) that appeared on March 6, 1999, they allege that "a [Los Alamos](#) computer scientist who is Chinese-American" had stolen nuclear secrets for [China](#).<sup>[19][20][21]</sup>

The suspect, later identified as [Wen Ho Lee](#), pleaded guilty to a single charge of improper handling of national defense information, the 58 other counts against him were dropped, and he was released from jail. No espionage charges were ever proven.<sup>[22]</sup> The judge apologized to Lee for believing the government and putting him in pretrial solitary confinement for months.

On September 26, 2000, [The New York Times](#) apologized for significant errors in reporting of the case.<sup>[23]</sup> Lee and [Helen Zia](#) would later write a book, *My Country Versus Me*, in which he described Risen and Gerth's work as a "hatchet job on me, and a sloppy one at that", and he points out numerous factual errors in Risen and Gerth's reporting.<sup>[24]</sup> [The New York Times](#) was one of five newspapers, including the [Los Angeles Times](#), which jointly agreed to pay damages to settle a lawsuit concerning their coverage of the case and invasion of privacy.<sup>[25][26]</sup>

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- [James Risen](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/r/james_risen/index.html) ([http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/r/james\\_risen/index.html](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/r/james_risen/index.html)) – Index of articles published in *The New York Times*, Times Topics.
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